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Energy and sustainable development

Coordination of activities of the organizations in the United Nations system in the field of energy

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development, at its second session, in February 1996, requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on coordination in energy for consideration by the Committee at its third session in 1998.[1] The Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 1996, approved the provisional agenda and documentation for the third session of the Committee, as amended (see A/51/3 (part II)). The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

II. Activities of the United Nations system in the field of energy

2. An overview of the policies and programmes as well as activities by respective entities of the United Nations system is contained in the earlier reports of the Secretary-General (see E/CN.17/1997/7 and Corr.1 and A/52/175-E/1997/75). These will be made available to the Committee at its third session. Policy discussions take place in various intergovernmental bodies, such as the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Economic and Social Council, the Second Committee of the General Assembly and other legislative bodies of the respective entities of the United Nations system.

3. A wide range of activities have been reported by the respective entities of the United Nations system, reflecting the mandates, policies and programmes of these entities. Details of the activities are contained in the annex to the report of the Secretary-General on inventory of energy-related programmes and activities of entities within the United Nations system to the Commission on Sustainable Development. The means of implementation of the programmes and activities have involved the preparation of studies and reports, technical assistance, organization and training of workshops, as well as seminars and conferences, institution and capacity-building for the assessment of resources, policy formulation, planning, analysis and data management and a provision of financial assistance.

4. The current policies, programmes and activities of the entities within the United Nations system in the field of energy largely emanate from the outcome of the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy, held at Nairobi, in 1981. Furthermore, in the light of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, many entities have adjusted their programmes, projects and activities in varying degrees. UNCED emphasized the key role that energy plays in achieving the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development, and stressed that the development and use of energy resources, and technologies should be realized in a socially acceptable manner. The activities of the respective entities of the United Nations system have since emphasized the relation between energy and sustainable development, and have, in varying degrees, espoused, *inter alia*, (a) increased efficiency in energy and material use, and (b) enhanced development and use of renewable sources of energy.

III. Cooperation and coordination of activities within the United Nations system in the field of energy

5. The need for cooperation and coordination of activities of the entities within the United Nations system, including those on energy, has been emphasized time and again over the years. Enhancing better coordination of activities at the national level has been of interest to the United Nations for a long time, given the fact that the main focus of development activities is at the country level where programmes are deployed in support of national priorities. Such a move will ensure relevance and foster the successful development of national capacity.

6. Although, on the basis of the available information, there appears to be cooperation and coordination of activities in the field of energy among the entities within the United Nations system, the nature of such activities is somewhat ad hoc and a common strategy is lacking. In particular, many activities in energy are undertaken at the country level, and cooperation in the development and implementation of those activities in response to the local situation appear to be minimal and would benefit greatly from a common strategy and enhanced sharing of experience.

7. At its nineteenth special session, the General Assembly stressed the need for encouraging better coordination on the issue of energy within the United Nations system and agreed, *inter alia*, that the work of the Committee should be more compatible with and supportive of the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development (see A/S-19/29, para. 135).

8. The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development has also emphasized the importance of

cooperation and coordination of activities within the United Nations system, including those on energy. It decided that specific measures to achieve inter-agency collaboration would be accomplished through (a) preparation of guidelines/manuals/methodologies or similar materials on national development; (b) organization of a series of sustainable development workshops; and (c) more systematic approach to the collection and dissemination of information on relevant topics. Accordingly, letters soliciting information on the above programmes were sent to respective entities of the United Nations system.

9. The merger of the three United Nations departments working in the economic and social fields into the Department of Economic and Social Affairs provides a good opportunity to bring together the United Nations Secretariat's analytical, normative and technical capacities, which should enrich both the policy and technical cooperation of the United Nations activities in various fields, including energy.

10. In recent years, further attempts have been made to enhance cooperation and coordination of activities within the United Nations system. An ad hoc Inter-agency Group on Energy was constituted in March 1996. It has held several meetings, one each in New York (March 1996), Geneva (September 1996), Paris (December 1996) and Vienna (October 1997). The meetings have provided an opportunity to discuss a range of issues, including specific activities and programmes of individual entities of the United Nations system and how these can be better coordinated. Emphasis has been made on better exchange of information, including improved access to and development as well as expansion of World Wide Web sites on energy, and cooperation in the formulation and implementation of projects and programmes, including their joint implementation. One of the issues that has generated a great deal of interest and discussion is that of the development of a common approach within the United Nations system on issues relating to energy. The topic was discussed at length in September and December 1996 at Geneva and in Paris, and more recently, in October 1997 at Vienna. The discussions on the development of a common approach are reflected in the report of the Secretary-General to the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In 1996, at Geneva and in Paris, the Group cooperated in the preparation of the above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General on an inventory of ongoing energy-related programmes and activities within the United Nations system for submission to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session. At its tenth session, at Geneva (17-19 September 1997), the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development stressed the need to ensure stronger focus on intergovernmental collaboration on the practical implementation of relevant activities, in particular, at the country level.

11. As part of preparations for the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 2001, which will be largely devoted to energy, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized an ad hoc brainstorming meeting in October 1997 aimed at identifying key issues for consideration at the meeting. A number of these issues were later discussed and elaborated upon at the ad hoc Inter-agency Group on Energy at Vienna in 1997, which, *inter alia*, agreed to the idea of the creation of a global forum on sustainable energy to foster an enhanced dialogue among Governments, international organizations, the business community, non-governmental organizations, and the academic community, as suggested in the joint report referred to below. As part of this cooperative effort, UNDP and the Department have prepared a joint report entitled "Energy and sustainable development: draft discussion paper on key issues and required actions", which is intended to help in identifying, clarifying and articulating key issues to be addressed by the intergovernmental process at the ninth session of the Commission.

IV. Recommendations

12. The following recommendations draw heavily on those contained in the reports of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session and to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. In the above-mentioned reports, it was suggested that coordination and cooperation should be enhanced through the following actions:

(a) Convening ad hoc meetings of the entities within the United Nations system dealing with energy in order for them to elaborate a common reference framework for actions in the field of energy and to achieve coherence and effectiveness in energy activities that contribute to sustainable development (this issue was discussed by the Commission and recommended for further consideration by the General Assembly at its nineteenth session in June 1997); to enhance the exchange of information on the different aspects of energy development and use, including policy issues; and to help in the improvement of energy data and information systems of the respective organizations;

(b) Devoting part of the agenda of the sessions of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development

to energy on a regular basis, and ensuring linkages with energy-related aspects of the work of other Administrative Committee on Coordination bodies;

(c) Cooperating with organizations outside the United Nations system in the field of energy;

(d) Encouraging joint programming and implementation of energy activities of common interest to the entities within the United Nations system.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 4*.